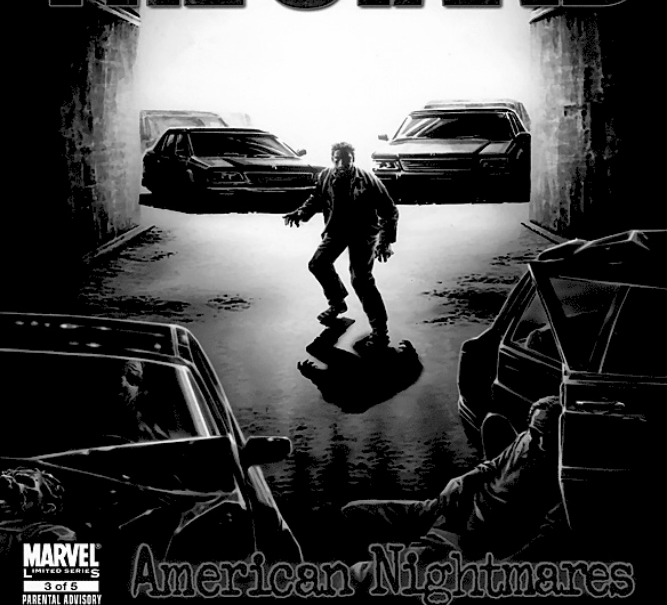


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STEPHEN KING THE STAND



MARVEL
LIMITED SERIES
3 of 5
PARENTAL ADVISORY

American Nightmares

AGUIRRE-SACASA PERKINS MARTIN

STEPHEN KING THE STAND

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Special Thanks to CHUCK VERRILL, MARSHA DEFILIPPO, BRIAN STARK, JIM NAUSEDAS, JIM MCCANN, ARUNE SINGH, CHRIS ALLO, LAUREN SANKOVITCH and JEFF SUTER.

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PREVIOUSLY IN THE STAND...

The deadly flu-like virus "Captain Trips" has killed off 99% of the country's population.

The thus-far-uninfected include:

Nick Andros, the deaf-mute deputy of Shoyo, Arkansas, and Lloyd Henreid, a death-row-bound killer wasting away in his cell, each one awaiting a greater force to liberate them from their prisons, physical and otherwise...

Frannie Goldsmith and her newly minted best friend Harold Lauder, who are currently planning their grand flight from Ogunquit, Maine...

Stu Redman, who has found some kind of freedom in the wild, after escaping from the CDC...

And don't forget Larry Underwood and wealthy widow Rita Blakemoor, who have decided to leave behind the Big Apple for greener pastures...

This, as they say, is when the going gets tough...



NEW YORK CITY.

RITA BLAKEMOOR AND LARRY UNDERWOOD.

The 'monster-shouter' they'd both heard the day they met.

So monsters were stalking the streets.

Human ones, from the look of those stab wounds.

We--we stick to the plan, Rita. We get to the Lincoln Tunnel, cross into Jersey, take 495 to Passaic. Then head northeast to New England. Make kind of a buttonhook.

Reach Maine,
Find a house
on the ocean,
remember?

Y-yes, Larry.
I-I'm sorry I
screamed like
that...



The way
leads ever
on...



What,
Rita?

Oh, it's a
line from Tolkien.
The Lord of the
Rings.

"The way
leads ever
on."

I always think
of it at the beginning
of a journey. As a sort
of gateway to adven--



--oh, my
Lord.

Oh,
Larry...



Not for the first time that day, Larry was grateful he'd thought to pick up a rifle at the Manhattan Sporting Goods store.



At Fifth and East Thirty-ninth, a man offered Larry a million dollars "for the use of his woman."

Back.
The hell.
Off.

Easy, man.
Can't blame a
guy for trying, can
you? Have a nice
day. Hang
loose.

At the intersection of Eleventh
Avenue and Thirty-ninth Street,
Larry heard a muffled cry of
pain from--

Rita?

I...

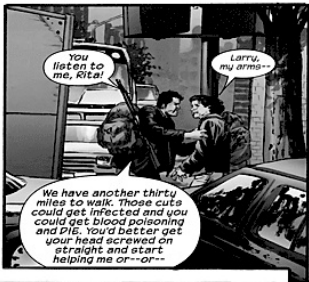
Larry,
I'm sor--

Rita, my God,
what's wrong
with you?

Were you thinking
you could cab back to
your apartment if your
feet got tired? You're
BLEEDING! How long
have your feet been
hurting?

Since...
since about
Fifth and
Forty-ninth,
I guess.

TWENTY
BLOCKS?!
And you didn't
say anything?





Fifteen seconds later:

Do that again
and I really will
leave you.



All right.

Have a
good time
getting
raped and
murdered.



When he looked back, expecting
to see her standing with her arms
crossed, accusing him with
her eyes, she was gone.

Fine, he thought, I
tried to apologize.





When he got to the tunnel,
Larry saw that its overhead
fluorescents were out.

It would be, he thought
with real dread, like
walking into an automobile
graveyard.



They would let him get half way, then they
would begin to stir, come alive...he would
hear the car doors clicking open and then
softly chunking closed...then shuffling
footsteps behind him and--



No answer. Next to him, there was a Caddy with its windows rolled up. It would be like a greenhouse in there. If he opened the door, its corpses would spill out and break open like rotten melons and the smell would be warm and steamy, wet and crawling with decay...



...the way it would smell in the tunnel.

Rita!
Ree-ta!





KRA-KOOM!!

By four o'clock, the sky was clotted with storm clouds and lightning was forking down between buildings.



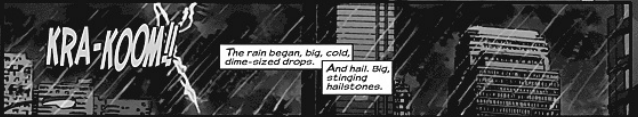
Larry was trying to think rationally:

He'd forgotten to bring a flashlight; all he had was his butane Bic lighter...

There was the George Washington Bridge, but that was seven miles to the north...

And there was a guardrail he could follow, right?

Everything else...the dead people in their cars coming to life...that was just comic book stuff.



KRA-KOOM!!

The rain began, big, cold, dime-sized drops.

And hail. Big, stinging hailstones.



Okay, he thought. Okay, okay, okay, I'm convinced.



At 4:09 PM, Larry stepped into the Lincoln Tunnel.

At first, there was enough light that he could see the cars, corpses cooking within them.

After the tunnel's first banked curve, Larry resorted to his Bic.

There was an echo in the tunnel that made it sound as if someone were following him, stalking him.

How long was the Lincoln Tunnel, anyway? A mile? Two?

Let's say a mile. The average man walks four miles an hour. He should be to the other end in no time, but--

I'm walking a lot slower.

...LOT SLOWER...

...SLOWER...

...SLOWER...

Fighting the urge to panic, Larry walked on, a step at a time, counting them out.

Larry was giving his lighter a break, groping his way through the dark, following the handrail--

~gasps~

--when his foot stepped on something stiff and unyielding.



A horrible sentinel.

A murdered soldier.

The Bic was growing hot in Larry's hand; whether he wanted to or not, he had to let it go out.



In the dark, he stepped over the dead soldier, afraid the corpse would reach up and grab him.

Then Larry ran--a shuffling sort of run--afraid that at any second his foot might come in contact with another body, and soon enough...

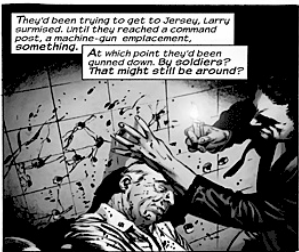
...it happened.

Six corpses this time. A Hasidic Jewish family. And they might've been sick, but Captain Trips hadn't killed them.



They'd been trying to get to Jersey, Larry surmised. Until they reached a command post, a machine-gun emplacement, something.

At which point they'd been gunned down. By soldiers? That might still be around?



Again, the lighter grew too hot to hold, and Larry put it in his pocket--a warm coal against his leg.

The solid darkness provided Larry the perfect screen on which his mind could play out its fantasies. He imagined:

Grim-eyed soldiers, looking through infrared peeps, their job to cut down any stragglers who tried to come through the tunnel...

Or perhaps just a single suicide volunteer, creeping towards him with a knife...



Yet Larry couldn't bring himself to go back; and surely the soldiers were now long gone.

No, what was really troubling him, Larry supposed, were the bodies directly in front of him.

He wouldn't be able to step over them the way he had the soldier. No, he would have to walk on them if--

Behind him, in the darkness, something moved?

Larry wheeled around--

Unslung his rifle--

Who's there?

...THERE...

...AIR...

...AIR...

Larry heard--thought he heard--the quiet sound of breathing.

The hairs along the nape of his neck turned into hackles.

He held his breath.

There was no sound.

He was beginning to dismiss the sound as his imagination when he heard it again: A single, sliding, quiet footstep.

Larry fumbled madly for the lighter, pulled it out, and--

CLINK!

CLINK!

CLATTER!

--the Bic had slipped from his hand, tumbling down to the hood of a car below.

Oh.
God.

His terror-locked mind gave him a picture of someone or something coming to kill him:

Then the sound of another step--

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

Blurry afterimages hung before his eyes-- of tile, of frozen lanes of traffic--as Larry's interior theater was now taken over by images. Not of soldiers, but...

...the Morlocks from the classic Comics version of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*.

From somewhere behind him, a desperate, wretched cry:

Larry! Oh, Larry, for God's sake--

For one wild second, he thought about not answering her, leaving her behind, but--

Rita, stay where you are. Do you hear me?

He ran towards her voice--

Larry! Larry don't leave me alone here, don't leave me alone in the dark--

He held her tightly.

Rita, did I...did I hurt you? Are you... shot?

N-no...one of the bullets went by so close I felt the wind of it...and tile chips, I think...on my face...

Oh, Jesus, I didn't know. You should have called out, I could've killed you...

The truth of it came home to him with a picture in his mind:

"I could have killed you..."

You won't leave me again, Larry, will you? You won't go away?

There's something left out of you. You're a taker.

He kissed her, then said:

No, Rita, never again.

There...there was a man, back there...I think I stepped on him, Larry...

There are more dead bodies up ahead, Rita. Can you stand that?

If you're with me...as long as you're with me, Larry...

They got over the sprawled bodies of the Jewish family, their arms slung about each other's necks like drunken chums leaving a neighborhood tavern.

At several points, Rita screamed.

At one point, Larry's foot punched into some dreadful sliminess and there was a gassy, putrid smell he tried to ignore.

Beyond the family, there were...more bodies.

Larry hoped they were the soldiers that had shot down the Jewish family, themselves killed by Captain Trips or whatever.

A short time later, Rita stopped mid-stride. Larry asked her:

What's the matter?
Something in the way?

No, Larry,
I can see...

It's the end of the tunnel!

He blinked.

And realized he could see the palest blur of Rita's face...

Larry, what if it only happened in New York? And that's why the army closed down the tunnel?

He doubted it, but started to walk faster.



The closer they got to the entrance, the more they could see.

Soldiers.



One last sprawling mass of bodies.



Give me your hand--

And don't look inside the cab--



Three more dead soldiers.

And machine guns and ammunition and canisters that looked like tear gas.

Christ, Larry thought...

Outside--on the other side of hell--a rain-dampened breeze pressed against them, and its wonderfully fresh smell seemed to make the tunnel's horrors all worthwhile--

--almost.

It wasn't just New York.

Oh, dear God...





OUTSIDE SOUTH RYEGATE, NEW HAMPSHIRE.



ROUTE 302.



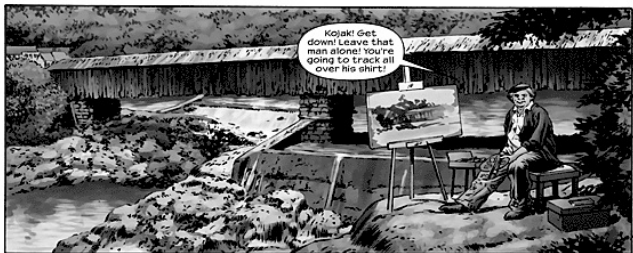
Stuart Redman looked at his walk towards the ocean as a kind of...healing process.



His first two nights on the road, he'd dreamed about Elder, the man who'd been sent to kill him. But last night...the dream hadn't come.

He supposed, in a way, that he might be walking the poison out of his system, little by little. At least, he hoped--





ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

The Lincoln Tunnel scene and the walk through Manhattan beforehand are two of the most visceral scenes in the novel of *The Stand*. I knew I had to get these scenes spot-on with no guessing and assuming of settings; this sequence had to be as realistic as possible and there was only ONE way to do that:

When I was in Manhattan for the New York ComicCon last year I made a point of re-tracing Larry's journey from Central Park, down Fifth Avenue, right on 39th Street and continuing on to the Lincoln Tunnel - making sure I took plenty of photographs along the way that I could use for exact reference. What made it even more poignant was when Bill Rosemann excitedly pointed out to me that Larry took his turn from Fifth Avenue right around the corner from the Marvel offices. I believe his words were "You see... it's destiny that Marvel is doing the adaptation to *The Stand*!"

I believe this extra effort at authenticity has paid off - especially when you get the sense that this sequence is taking place in a real environment through the illustrations. Below are a few of the photographs alongside the resulting panel illustrations:



IMAGE 1: Here we find our unfortunate Looter swinging from a lamp-post on Fifth Avenue. I knew, at some point, I would need a "worm's eye view" of things and snapped away accordingly.



IMAGE 2: The point where Larry and Rita turn into 39th Street HAD to be exact - and yet I've attempted to set moments throughout the adaptation in the time frame of the unabridged version of the novel - at the beginning of the '90s (Thus, the disappearance of that eerie shiny canister thing by the crossing!). Admittedly, some of the shops and building work may not have been there at the time but I guess I utilized the well worn artistic license. Here I've combined two separate elements from the photos: the street scene itself, and the ubiquitous New York hot dog stand.





IMAGES 3 and 4:

New York street scenes can be notoriously hard to illustrate from memory. There are too many elements in the real street environment for you to take in visually - this is where the photo reference invariably helps (and simultaneously giving you more work in the long run!).





IMAGES 5 AND 6

I took many, many photos of the Lincoln Tunnel entrance (adding a lot more decay, grit and damage along the way). A lot of these images I used to portray the panorama of the variant covers for the first volume of *The Stand - Captain Trips*. I can't emphasize enough the need for me to get these settings exactly right and present the reader with a true vision of the events. I hope you feel it's worked out.

Thanks,

Mike Perkins

Tampa, FL May 2009.

Script to final

PAGE SEVENTEEN.

PANEL ONE.

Okay, we're nearing the end of our trip through the heart of darkness, so a larger panel, Mike. And we can much more clearly see Larry and Rita (Larry helping Rita) picking their way over a pile of corpses. Soldiers. Stepping as carefully as possible, but it's not easy, since there are so many of them, gunned down by who knows what.

CAPTION: The closer they got to the entrance, the more light there was, the more they could see.

CAPTION: Soldiers.

PANEL TWO.

One last hurdle to cross, Mike. Larry and Rita (Larry helping Rita) picking their way over a pile of corpses. Soldiers. Stepping as carefully as possible, but it's not easy, since there are so many of them, gunned down by who knows what.

CAPTION: There was one last sprawling mass of bodies where the catwalk descended to join the exit ramp.

PANEL THREE.

Actually, this is the last hurdle. As the caption tells us, two army trucks, parked front-bumper to front-bumper, are blocking the tunnel's entrance. Larry is already crouched on one of the truck's hoods, reaching down to help Rita up. On the other side of the trucks, blessed daylight!!

CAPTION: Two huge army convoy trucks, parked nose-to-nose, blocked the tunnel's mouth.

LARRY: Give me your hand—

LARRY: And don't look inside the cab—

PANEL FOUR.

More of zeroing in, on: Larry. We're looking over his shoulder at what he's looking at, which is: The cab of one of the trucks. Three dead, decomposing soldiers, inside it, their necks bent at hideous angles. Sandwiched between/among them: Weapons of destruction. Rifles, machine guns, canisters of tear gas, you name it.

CAPTION: Rita didn't, but Larry did. Three more dead soldiers.

CAPTION: And machine guns and ammunition and canisters that looked like tear gas.

CAPTION: Christ, Larry thought...



PANEL ONE.

On the outside, looking at the entrance of the Lincoln Tunnel, on the New Jersey side. Larry (on the panel's left) is helping Rita (on the right) stand up, both of them planted on the hood's of those parked army trucks, looking out across the landscape that's greeting them.

CAPTION: Outside—on the other side of hell—a rain-dampened breeze pressed against them, and its wonderfully fresh smell seemed to make the tunnel's horrors all worthwhile—

CAPTION:—almost.

LARRY: There. You see?

PANEL TWO.

The page's biggest panel, by far, Mike. And we're looking at the back of Larry and Rita's heads. (That's at one of the panel's extremes.) The bulk of this panel is taken up by what they're looking at, which is: Lanes separated by tollbooths (one of the booths, smashed to bits). Half of the lanes, leading out of New York, are empty. The ones leading into New York are clogged with dead cars. Corpses everywhere. Seagulls and crows perched on many of the cars' roofs.

LARRY: It wasn't just New York.

PANEL THREE.

Back to Larry and Rita, a close-up on them, looking at them from the neck-up. Shoulders-up. The enormity/horror of their situation really hitting Rita, whose eyes are filling with tears.

RITA: Oh, dear God...



The Stand: Tunnel Visions

Artist Mike Perkins goes underground for a subterranean journey into horror in *THE STAND: AMERICAN NIGHTMARES* #3

by Sean T. Collins

"Are we there yet?"

That familiar phrase has been heard on countless family trips and long drives. But picture, if you will, that you're stranded on the island of Manhattan with millions of corpses, the power out, and the roads clogged with crashed cars and their dead drivers. Now imagine that the only way out lies through the claustrophobic, pitch-black Lincoln Tunnel deep beneath the Hudson River to New Jersey—1.5 miles of cadaver-strewn darkness you have to navigate on foot, without getting stuck, getting killed, or going insane in the process.

"Are we there yet?" takes on a whole new sense of urgency, doesn't it?

That's the situation for Larry Underwood and Rita Blakemoor in issue #3 of *THE STAND: AMERICAN NIGHTMARES*—on sale May 20—which spends the bulk of its pages tackling this memorable sequence from Stephen King's post-apocalyptic masterpiece. And the creative team of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and Mike Perkins have been asking "Are we there yet?" about this eagerly anticipated issue ever since the project launched.

Marvel.com spoke with Perkins, artist of the series, about what makes this issue such a can't-miss, the unique challenges of making horror comics, and whether there's a light at the end of the tunnel for the protagonists.

Marvel.com: You and Roberto have been talking about this issue ever since *THE STAND* was first announced. What makes it so special?



Mike Perkins: I think it's a turning point in the novel. Most of our main protagonists are now set up and have started their initial journeys both physically and mentally. This scene with Larry just oozes tension. The sequence in the book only lasts a few pages but because of its intensity it feels a lot longer—and it stays with you even more so. For something that's basically a man walking through a pitch black tunnel—well, that's pretty damn impressive writing.

Marvel.com: Most of the time, adaptations are a matter of whittling down the source material to fit a new medium, but this is a case where you've expanded the source material; virtually the entire issue is spent tracing Larry and Rita's nightmarish journey through the Lincoln Tunnel. It's just two characters performing one simple task—why devote so much space to it?

Mike Perkins: For most of the reasons above, really. It's one of the monumental scenes in the book and one that I was determined to get exactly right. When I was in New York last year I walked Larry's route from Central Park down to the Lincoln Tunnel—via 5th Avenue, turning right on 39th—and taking a ton of reference photos. I wanted this scene to be perfect. Of course, by doing this, I opened up myself to a whole mountain of hand-crank! Those New York scenes seemingly took forever to illustrate, but I think it was worth it in the long run.



Marvel.com: Horror comics are often seen to have certain limitations in terms of scaring the audience. Comics are visual in addition to verbal, so you can't let the reader's imagination do the heavy lifting like a horror novel can. But they're also silent and unfold at whatever pace you read them rather than the speed a director or editor chooses, so you can't do "jump scares" like horror movies can. This issue is maybe the purest horror story we've seen from *THE STAND* so far. What challenges did that present you as an artist, and how did you overcome them?

Mike Perkins: There are certain moments I've expanded on from the source material, [adding] a little touch of horror that even the constant readers of King lore would not expect. With regards to the tunnel, that's a particularly challenging operation in sequential storytelling as, when you're reading the book, the reader is handling the fear in their own particular way. A fear of the dark is fairly universal and a person's imagination is

their own worst enemy in that situation. We've chosen to keep things fairly dark and shadowy but highlight Larry's own vivid imaginings, and through this we can visually highlight the horror.

Marvel.com: What is your take on what this journey means for Larry and Rita, both individually and as a couple? Obviously it's a lot more emotionally grueling than your average Jersey-bound commute.

Mike Perkins: I'm sure the Jersey-bound commuters would heartily disagree with you there, but yes, it is fairly grueling. I guess for Larry and Rita it must have seemed like they were forcing themselves onward through the horror and away from the danger of Manhattan. I'm sure it says a lot about human nature in the sense that they both go into the horror alone and almost crack up from the strain but then, when faced together, the journey becomes a little easier. I'm almost certain they felt that if they get through this it couldn't possibly get any worse. Little do they know...

Marvel.com: Finally, do you get claustrophobic in tunnels, or jumpy when it's pitch black around you? How do you think you'd fare if you were in Larry or Rita's shoes?

Mike Perkins: I don't get too scared in darkness, but I'm not sure I could have done what Larry and Rita put themselves through. They've walked through the horrors of a disease-ridden post-apocalyptic Manhattan. They've experienced Captain Trips firsthand and they've no doubt felt the presence of the Walking Dude. They have no idea whatsoever as to the greeting they may or may not receive on the other side, yet they still force themselves through that darkness. I think I would have taken a small rowing boat across—and I definitely wouldn't have worn Rita's shoes!



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MIKE PERKINS' CHILLING BLACK AND WHITE
ART FOR THIS ISSUE'S VARIANT



Next: Is Randall Flagg the key?



"The art team makes you truly fear Captain Tripps, Randall Flagg, those that run wild, and how distressingly bleak the entire situation has become."

--Kyle Posluszny, WEEKLY COMIC BOOK REVIEW.com



The end is nigh as a deadly plague sweeps the nation and widespread panic overcomes the dying masses of America in a terrifying and inexorable tide. Who will be left to rebuild on the ruins of their past lives as the ancient rivalry of Good vs. Evil has only just begun?

Based on the popular apocalyptic novel by celebrated author Stephen King, *The Stand* brings together critically acclaimed writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa (*Sensational Spider-Man*, *Angel: Revelations*, HBO's *Big Love*) and the gritty visuals of artist Mike Perkins (*Captain America*) to tell a tale which begins at the end of the world.

